The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Longtime American Expat Denied Re-Entry to St. Petersburg

By Ivan Nechepurenko

June 03, 2015



According to his LinkedIn page, Tokolish had been working for investment firm NCH Advisors since 1997.

During a routine passport inspection at St. Petersburg's Pulkovo Airport, a U.S. citizen who had lived in the city for more than two decades was informed he was no longer welcome in Russia, local news site Fontanka.ru reported Tuesday.

John Tokolish has been added to a list of foreigners banned from entering Russia, the website reported, citing unnamed sources. Though his permanent residency permit was recently annulled, he still had a valid entry visa, according to Fontanka.

The St. Petersburg branch of the Federal Security Service has not confirmed that Tokolish, who had been living in Russia since the early 1990s, was denied entry, Fontanka reported.

According to his LinkedIn page, Tokolish had been working for investment firm NCH Advisors

since 1997. He has been dividing his time between Kiev and St. Petersburg recently, Fontanka reported, indicating that this could have played a role in his exclusion from Russia in light of the ongoing standoff between Kiev and Moscow.

Tokolish is a friend of Jennifer Gaspar, another U.S. expat who was recently pushed out of the country after having spent years living in St. Petersburg. Gaspar, an NGO consultant, was ordered to leave in August last year over murky claims that she posed a threat to Russian national security.

Critics immediately cried foul over Gaspar's deportation order, decrying it as an attempt to intimidate human rights activists. Gaspar's husband Ivan Pavlov is a well-known human rights lawyer who has championed transparency and represented some of Russia's most high-profile defendants in recent months.

“The fact that Tokolish was denied entry in St. Petersburg is the consequence of yet another delusional decision by our security agencies. I have known John for about 10 years, and it is difficult for me to imagine any other foreigner who loves St. Petersburg and Russia as much as he does,” Pavlov said in comments carried by Interfax on Wednesday. “The decision ... is more than strange.”

Fontanka suggested that Tokolish's friendship with Gaspar and Pavlov could have been the basis for his denial of entry.

“It seems highly unlikely that the people in my inner circle are being targeted deliberately,” Pavlov said in his comments to Interfax. “But if this is the case, it's very sad to see.”

Tokolish owns a luxurious flat in St. Petersburg, on the edge of Kryukov Canal overlooking the grand St. Nicholas Cathedral. Fontanka further speculated that someone anxious to get their hands on the enviable property could have been behind Tokolish's ejection from Russia.

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Original url:
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